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THE PERSIAN GULF WAR:
A "STORM" TOO SHORT ?

BY

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A paper submitted to the faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

Signature

Paul W. Trotti

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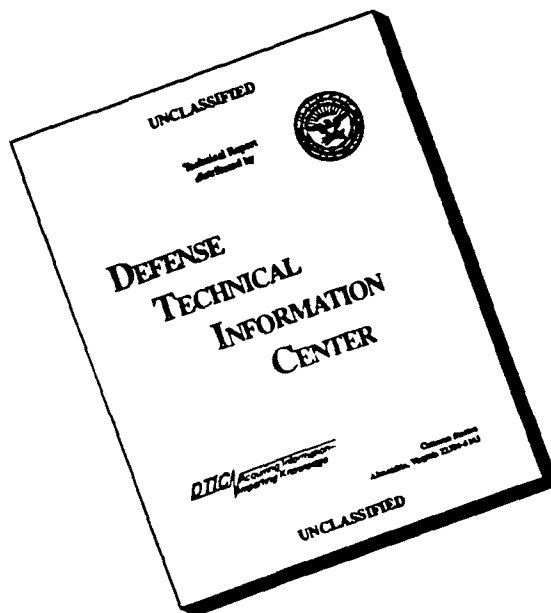
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Abstract of
The Persian Gulf War: A "Storm" Too Short ?

An examination of the conceptual framework for war termination provides a foundation for an assessment of war termination in the Persian Gulf War. The successful accomplishment of the military objectives of Operation DESERT STORM - targeted at Iraqi centers of gravity - is assessed as having achieved the national political objectives established by the President. Most significantly, the political aim of ensuring the peace and stability of the region is determined to have been best achieved by not destroying the regime of Saddam Hussein; and termination of the ground offensive after only 100 hours allowed major elements of the Republican Guard to escape, yet still served to accomplish U.S. military and political objectives. Finally, the war offers the operational-level commander some considerations for war termination in future conflict, to include: (1) communications that provide the National Command Authority with real-time battlefield information and the impact of that capability on decisionmaking; (2) the critical importance of training/educating officers to function on the staffs of the Unified Combatant Commanders; (3) concerns about retention of domestic support; and (4) the need for doctrine addressing war/conflict termination.

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I. INTRODUCTION

"The Gulf War was a magnificent military victory barren of any significant military gains."¹

Almost as soon as the ceasefire went into effect on 28 February 1991, critics began to question the President's decision to end the Persian Gulf War after a ground offensive of only 100 hours. Whether or not U.S. national objectives had been accomplished became an issue of heated debate, particularly as Saddam Hussein's forces were redirected to quell a Shiite rebellion in southern Iraq and to resume fighting with the Kurds in the north. General Schwarzkopf, commander of the U.S. - led Coalition forces, added fuel to the fire in an interview on 27 March 1991, when he indicated that he would have liked to "continue the march" against the Iraqis.² Jeffrey Record asserts, in Hollow Victory: A Contrary View of the Gulf War, that "the war was a great success while it lasted, but it lasted not long enough to bear worthwhile political fruit."³ Record pushed the argument further: "No satisfactory...resolution of the Gulf Crisis was possible without Saddam Hussein's removal from power...."⁴

The issue here is war termination, of the meshing of political goals with operational military objectives and the effectiveness of military action in achieving political objectives, thereby attaining "victory" as defined by the participants. In order to assess war termination in the Persian Gulf, it will be helpful to examine the concept of war termination so as to better understand - based on existing theory and emerging doctrine - the components of "winning", and to apply these thoughts to the stated U.S. goals and the degree of their accomplishment in the Gulf.

In this paper, I will argue that U.S. policy objectives and resulting war termination strategy correctly eschewed a "march to Baghdad" and destruction of

Saddam Hussein's regime through military action. At the operational level of war, termination of the fighting prior to destruction of the Republican Guard in the Basra pocket, however, presents a much more complex issue. Evidence indicates that - while the military objectives of the campaign were accomplished, thereby also achieving our strategic political objectives - they were not accomplished to the degree possible, with the result that attainment of those national objectives may have been degraded.

Finally, in light of the discussion of war termination doctrine and theory and the assessment of war termination in the Gulf, I will offer some considerations for the operational-level commander, for Commanders in Chief of Unified Combatant Commands, that may be of concern or assistance in the planning and conduct of future campaigns.

II. PHILOSOPHICAL UNDERPINNINGS AND EMERGING DOCTRINE

Other than his oft-quoted assertion that war is an extension of politics by other means, Clausewitz is perhaps best known for his maxim linking strategy and operations to political aims: "No one starts a war - or rather, no one in his senses ought to do so - without first being clear in his mind what he intends to achieve by that war and how he intends to conduct it. The former is its political purpose; the latter its operational objective."⁵ Clearly, Clausewitz provides some critical guidance here on war and on proper war termination; he advises the would-be user of military force to first determine exactly what is to be accomplished - the end state to be produced by the use of military power. And further, he admonishes the user to determine how forces are to be used to bring about that situation, by establishing military objectives that, when accomplished, will achieve the strategic political

aims of the government. Finally, it is clear that the end state and the "how to" for the use of force should be determined prior to the commencement of the war.

While Clausewitz's admonition might seem rather self-evident, particularly for modern observers who have watched the great debates over the use of the military to achieve political objectives in the Persian Gulf, in Somalia, and potentially in Bosnia, Fred Charles Ikle makes it clear that, in reality, the process is extremely difficult: "Most of the exertion is devoted to the means - perfecting the military instruments and deciding on their use in battles and campaigns - and far too little is left for relating the means to their ends."⁶ Because "the final outcome of wars depends on a much wider range of factors... such as the war's impact on domestic politics or on the degree to which outside powers will intervene," it is often true that "governments tend to lose sight of the ending of wars and the nation's interests that lie beyond it."⁷ All of which makes it that much clearer that Clausewitz's concern is incisive: the state must establish - prior to fighting - the political objectives for which it will fight, the end state that will constitute victory, and how military forces will be used to attain that end.

But, given the state's political objectives as it approaches a conflict, the development of a military strategy and operational objectives that will achieve those political aims requires a clear understanding of the enemy's society, his government, his armed forces, and the interrelationship among them - "the remarkable trinity" of Clausewitzian theory. COL Bruce Clarke, one of the Army's leading thinkers on war termination, asserts that victory will be achieved as a result of the "successful defense of one's own center of gravity combined with action that, at least indirectly, attacks the opponent's center of gravity with the result being that he [the enemy] changes his objectives."⁸

The key (if easy to overlook) point that COL Clarke makes is that the planner must not only ascertain and be able to attack the center(s) of gravity (COG) of the

enemy. He must also understand his own state's COG, and must therefore plan the campaign so that he attacks the enemy's COG, while simultaneously protecting his own. Clausewitz was surely taking one's own center of gravity into consideration in his discussion of war's political objective: "Since war is not an act of senseless passion but is controlled by its political object, the value of this object must determine the sacrifices to be made for it in magnitude and in duration."⁹ Due to the complex interrelationships among the three parts of the Clausewitzian triangle - the government, the armed forces, and the people - the value placed upon attainment of the political end must not be so great that it upsets the balance within the triangle. In a state such as our own, public support is crucial to prosecution of a war; and the more extensive the war in its magnitude or its length, the more crucial it is that the people support it. Further, the greater the scale of the war and the more protracted, the more likely that public support will become a COG. The U.S. experience in Vietnam highlights the impact of a protracted and seemingly endless war (despite the massive application of military power) on popular support. In effect, the support of the American people was a center of gravity for the U.S. effort in Vietnam. The war's protraction, accompanied by a steady stream of casualties and evidencing no end in sight, eventually drove the U.S. to terminate its participation in the war; and the Communists, unsuccessful on the battlefield, garnered victory at the bargaining table.

From the American perspective, Clausewitz's concern about the cost "in magnitude and duration" increasingly focuses on concern for casualties. Jeffrey Record describes American sensitivity to casualties as a potential vulnerability in warfare. Citing the emergence of this sensitivity in the Western democracies' horror at the slaughter in the World War I trenches, Record describes American fear over casualties as a lingering effect of the Vietnam War.¹⁰ To a great extent, American fascination with high technology weapons systems and laser guided munitions, with

their lethal capability and simultaneous diminution of collateral damage, reflects American attempts to minimize needless death and destruction on the battlefield.

In his 1992 report, Conflict Termination: A Rational Model, COL Clarke describes the effect of the international environment on the state's political objectives, its creation of military objectives to achieve them, and hence its description of "victory". The potential for third party involvement in the conflict, international legal constraints, and the objectives of both enemy and friendly allies form the international environment which influences the formulation of the state's political and military objectives and the desired end state to be achieved by war.¹¹ The use of force against another state is likely to precipitate its use by others, depending on international law and existing (or potential) alliances. The degree of force and its political objective may either encourage or discourage participation by other states. And that participation may be advantageous or perilous to the achievement of the aims of the state planning for war.

The analysis of war termination to this point makes it evident that the state as a responsible must determine the political objectives to be attained by war. In so doing, it must consider the value of those objectives in terms of the "capital" it must expend to achieve them - in terms of magnitude and duration (the number of lives lost, the resources in money and equipment spent, and the length of time it is willing to commit to pursuit of those objectives) - prior to determining that they are simply not worth the cost. Furthermore, particularly in a democratic state, the support of the people is critical, especially if the war is great in terms of length or scale. Equally important, the weight of international law should be seen to support the country, thus providing the state with the moral "high ground", significant to maintenance of domestic support as well as in creating or retaining international influence and prestige. Finally, the war should be fought with consideration for the impact on other states, so as to preclude their involvement if

that would have a deleterious effect on our cause; or it should encourage their participation if that would be advantageous.

On the surface, it would appear that the discussion just summarized deals specifically with the political side of war making and with military planning at the strategic level. Certainly all of the concepts described were applicable at the level of the National Command Authority (NCA) in the planning and conduct of Operations DESERT SHIELD and DESERT STORM. But for the purposes of this paper it is necessary to address the theory and doctrine as it applies to the operational level, and to the operational-level commander and his planners, for our purposes the Commander in Chief (CINC) of a Unified Command and his staff.

Army doctrine is not very specific when it addresses conflict termination. Most guidance is highly theoretical, and not written for easy practical application. The recently published draft of Army Field Manual 100-5: Operations, the 1982 and 1985 versions of which have been lauded for their contribution to American operational-level doctrine, offers the following:

At the end of the war comes peace, and with it our attainment of the strategic ends for which we went to war in the first place. We gain peace by terminating the conflict on terms favorable to us, the basic element of which is gaining control over the enemy in the final stages of the war. When we can impose our will freely on the enemy, he has no further recourse but to accept defeat.... Knowing when to end a war and how to preserve the objectives for which it was fought is a vital component of campaign design. Before the first shot is fired, the theater commander must have a view as to how he desires to terminate and preserve the aims achieved.¹²

With a little more (but not much more) specificity, the Field Manual instructs that "conflict termination requires more than just the defeat of a military force. It requires attaining dominance in the final stages of a conflict by achieving both political and military leverage sufficient enough to impose a more lasting victory."

The concept, design, and implementation of this leverage is an integral element of operational design. It epitomizes the link between political aims and military force in achieving a strategic end-state."¹³ In effect, the above quoted sections provide little more than the guidance already offered by Clausewitz: Know what your political objectives are; design military objectives (a campaign plan) that will achieve them.

The operational-level commander's role, as implied by the field manual, is to design the plan and employ the forces to achieve the military objectives. As COL Clarke indicated, the force must be used to establish conditions that force the enemy to change his political objectives. And although doctrine apparently fails to provide much specific guidance to the operational-level commander, the commander at that level is obliged to take into account the same considerations entertained by the national leaders at the strategic level: He must understand the enemy and friendly centers of gravity, attacking those of the enemy while protecting his own; he must consider the cost of the campaign, for his advice and expertise is crucial in assessments provided to the political leadership for their decisionmaking. And he must be aware of the international environment, so as to orchestrate the campaign in accordance to international law and to have the most desirable impact on other international actors (the states in the region), as well as on his own state. Military operations must reflect domestic values and the campaign should produce sufficient successes (incremental dividends) to maintain domestic popular support. But the primary task of the CINC as the operational-level commander is the selection of military objectives that will, by their accomplishment, secure the nation's political aims. Military doctrine provides extensive guidance and instruction on how to combat and destroy an opposing military force; but it tells the commander very little about how to select the objectives that will ensure destruction of the enemy state's center(s) of gravity, and thereby achieve political aims.

The next section will examine U.S. political objectives in the Persian Gulf War and the military objectives General Schwarzhopf, as the operational-level commander, devised to attain the political aims.

III. WAR OBJECTIVES: THE PERSIAN GULF

Within days of Iraq's invasion of Kuwait on 2 August 1990, President Bush formulated and announced the U.S. national political objectives in the crisis. They were four-fold:

- immediate and unconditional withdrawal of Iraqi forces from Kuwait;
- restoration of the legitimate government of Kuwait;
- the "security and stability of Saudi Arabia and the Persian Gulf"; and
- the "safety and protection" of Americans abroad ¹⁴

Based on these objectives, the President announced on 8 August 1990 that American forces were deploying to Saudi Arabia to defend the Desert Kingdom and to deter further Iraqi aggression. Additionally, in consonance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 661, which imposed a trade and financial embargo on Iraq,¹⁵ the United States Navy, in coordination with the naval forces of the emerging Coalition, began to enforce trade sanctions on Iraq.

In November 1990, President Bush ordered ground forces in the Gulf doubled in size in order to provide an offensive capability; and on 29 November, UN Security Council Resolution 678 authorized the use of "all means necessary" to eject Iraqi forces from Kuwait if not withdrawn by 15 January 1991.¹⁶

With the President's decision to build the offensive capability and the UN mandate authorizing the use of force, General Schwarzkopf began in earnest to plan the campaign to eject Iraq from Kuwait. In order to facilitate achievement of the national political objectives, the CINC focused on what had been determined to be Iraqi centers of gravity:

- "command, control, and leadership of the regime";
- enemy capability in weapons of mass destruction; and
- Republican Guard forces in the Kuwaiti Theater of Operations (KTO).¹⁷

Destruction of these DOGs were believed by GEN Schwarzkopf to be the key to the Iraqi regime and its capability and determination to remain in Kuwait. He therefore devised the following military objectives for the campaign:

- to attack the Iraqi political-military leadership, and command and control;
- to gain and maintain air superiority in the theater;
- to destroy known "nuclear, biological, and chemical production, storage, and delivery capabilities";
- to destroy the Republican Guard forces in the KTO; and
- to liberate Kuwait City.¹⁸

On 16 January 1991 (17 January in the Gulf), Operation DESERT STORM commenced with a massive air offensive that quickly achieved air superiority; struck at Iraqi command, control, and communications capability; devastated the military-industrial complex; and isolated and attrited the Republican Guard and other Iraqi forces in the KTO. On 23 February (24 February in the Gulf), the ground offensive began, with

Coalition and U.S. Marine forces striking into Kuwait, penetrating Iraqi barriers and fixing the enemy in place, while the U.S. VII Corps and XVIII Airborne Corps conducted the now-famous "Hail Mary" play, enveloping Iraqi forces in the KTD from the west to cut them off and facilitate their destruction in the Basra pocket.

On 27 February, as the VII and XVIII Corps forces continued to attack, GEN Schwarzkopf received a call from GEN Powell, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, asking for his assessment of the situation and communicating the President's desire to end the ground war at 100 hours. GEN Schwarzkopf considered the possibility of continuing the fight through the next day, but decided that "we'd accomplished our mission....there wasn't enough left of Iraq's army for it to be a regional military threat."¹⁹ Furthermore, if the Coalition attack continued, "more of our troops would get killed...."²⁰ Just a few hours earlier, the CINC had told a press conference in Riyadh that the Coalition had already destroyed "over twenty-nine Iraqi divisions" and that the "gates" out of the Basra pocket, where the remaining enemy in the KTD were, "are closed". He described the remaining Iraqi army - outside the KTD - as "a very large army, but most of the army that is left north of the Tigris-Euphrates Valley is an infantry army. It's not an armored army.... it really isn't an offensive army."²¹ There was "not enough left at all for him to be a regional threat...."²²

In a nutshell, GEN Schwarzkopf had assessed that, at the end of six weeks of air strikes and 100 hours of the ground war, the military objectives of Operation DESERT STORM had been achieved. As a result of the accomplishment of the military objectives in the campaign and Iraqi concessions in the ceasefire agreement, the Administration proclaimed the accomplishment of U.S. political objectives in the conflict.

IV. ASSESSMENT

In assessing the accomplishment of U.S. objectives in the Persian Gulf War, several questions should be answered. First, were the military objectives of Operation Desert Storm actually accomplished? If so, did their accomplishment translate into attainment of the national political objectives? In other words, did the use of force achieve the "victory" - the desired end state proclaimed by the political decisionmakers? And finally, if the military and political objectives were achieved, were they sufficient? Or did the survival of Saddam Hussein and his Baathist regime make victory in the Gulf hollow?

Although all of the evidence is not yet in, the information that is of primary importance for this assessment is that which was known (or should have been known) by the principal actors as the war ended. Historical judgements may change as time passes, and certainly events will continue to unfold in the Middle East. But to make sense of recent events and to determine lessons that will be applicable for near-future planners and commanders, it is necessary to judge the principals' decisions based on what was known at the time or can be directly attributed to those decisions.

In consideration of the military objectives of the campaign, the evidence indicates that they were accomplished during DESERT STORM. The extensive bombing of the air offensive did significantly reduce the capability of the Iraqi regime and its subordinate commanders to command and control their forces in the KTO. Interrogation of ranking Iraqi prisoners of war indicated that, even if they had known about the Coalition's plan to conduct the massive envelopment of their forces from the west, they had neither the communications nor transportation capability to respond to prevent it.²³ Similarly, the destruction of the Iraqi Air Force and its total ineffectiveness demonstrated the total superiority of the Coalition in the

air. Destruction of the critical bridges across the Tigris and the Euphrates, as well as the interdiction of resupply and reinforcements attempting to enter the KTO, effectively isolated Iraqi forces in the KTO.

The destruction of Iraq's known capability for nuclear, biological, and chemical warfare was conducted during DESERT STORM and continues during the post-war period as UN inspection teams investigate and destroy sites for production of weapons of mass destruction. Despite the surprising number of sites that have since been identified and the Iraqi regime's intransigence in following the terms of the ceasefire agreement, the military objective of the campaign should be assessed as accomplished. This is due in part to the destruction accomplished by the campaign itself, and the remainder due to the agreement for subsequent inspections by the UN to destroy the rest. The difficulties dealing with the regime should not impact on assessment of the military objective as having been accomplished. That concern hinges instead on survival of the regime, an issue that will be addressed in discussion of the attainment and sufficiency of our political objectives.

Finally, the discussion of the last two military objectives provides both for certainty and some doubt. Certainly success was achieved in the liberation of Kuwait City and the return of that city to Kuwaiti control. But the destruction of Republican Guard forces in the KTO must be carefully considered. The Republican Guard was targeted as a center of gravity because its destruction was predicted to "reduce dramatically Iraq's ability to conduct a coordinated defense of Kuwait or to pose an offensive threat to the region later."²⁴ Although heavily targeted during the air offensive and further attrited by the U.S. VII Corps during the ground offensive, the decision to effect the ceasefire at 260800 February 1991 allowed roughly four and one half of Saddam Hussein's eight Republican Guard divisions to escape from the trap set in the Basra pocket.²⁵ Estimates in 1992 further indicated that the "Iraqi army retained an estimated 2,400 tanks, 4,400 armored personnel

carriers and infantry fighting vehicles, 1,000-2,000 pieces of artillery... and 250 multiple rocket launchers."²⁶ Although this constitutes a significant reduction from a pre-war force that included 4,280 tanks and 3,100 artillery pieces,²⁷ the remaining capability still represents significant combat power in the region. It is due to the survival of the four and one half divisions of the Republican Guard that a strong case can be made that the ground offensive was terminated too quickly.

In his book It Doesn't Take a Hero, GEN Schwarzkopf describes the quick decisionmaking process that led to termination of the fighting. Receiving a call from GEN Powell at 272330 February, he was asked whether military objectives had been met, and whether it was now feasible to obtain a ceasefire. GEN Schwarzkopf, despite the 3rd Army Commander's request for an additional day to destroy Iraqi forces in the Basra pocket, determined that sufficient destruction of Iraqi forces had been accomplished, and that continued fighting was unnecessary and would result in needless casualties.²⁸ The fog of war, described so well by Clausewitz, makes a complete and accurate picture of the battlefield difficult in the midst of battle. This decision - forced as it was by the political pressure to stop the killing - was made on the spot without the fullest understanding of the situation that should have been acquired prior to ending hostilities. The ceasefire, and the resultant orders to hold in place, allowed more of the enemy to escape than GEN Schwarzkopf realized at the time. GEN Schwarzkopf made a momentous decision from his command post in Riyadh, hundreds of miles from the fighting, based on progress reports from units in the midst of the battle.

That the Republican Guard was significantly damaged cannot be denied. From that perspective, the military objective had been accomplished; Iraqi forces fled Kuwait and have clearly posed no external threat in the region since the war. But the fact that it was not totally destroyed at least threatened the magnitude of accomplishment of the nation's political objectives, since the Iraqi capability

maintained potentially reduces the time before Saddam may again pose an external threat.

With the exception of the destruction of the Republican Guard, I have argued that all of the Coalition's military objectives were totally fulfilled; and the heavy attrition of the Republican Guard did lead to ejection of Iraq from Kuwait and the reduction of Iraq's offensive capability. This accomplishment of the military objectives should also be reflected, then, in the attainment of our national political objectives.

Little argument is likely in the assertion of successful accomplishment of three of the Administration's four stated national policy objectives: Iraqi forces were ejected from Kuwait; the legitimate government of the Emirate was restored; and the safety of American citizens abroad secured. But major debate continues to swirl around the issue of whether the war actually ensured "the security and stability of Saudi Arabia and the Persian Gulf."²⁹ Jeffrey Record claims that "American war aims manifestly encompassed Saddam Hussein's removal from power and the permanent elimination of Iraq's ability to threaten its neighbors,"³⁰ which he asserts were "subsumed" under the aim of "ensuring 'the security and stability of the Persian Gulf'."³¹

An appreciation for Coalition members' objectives and concerns, however, make Saddam's removal as a prerequisite for "victory" less convincing. British and French concerns about "wanton killing" if the war continued,³² and regional states' fears of the potential seizure of power in Iraq by Kurds or Shiites³³ underscored U.S. concerns about responsibility for creating a power vacuum in Iraq, similar to the multi-sided conflict in Lebanon that might draw the U.S. into a quagmire³⁴ and further destabilize the region. Additionally, the UN mandate (Security Council Resolution 678), which the U.S. relied upon as its legal foundation for military action by the Coalition - and, as such, as a binding force for the Coalition itself

- only authorized the expulsion of Iraq from Kuwait. No authorization existed for the destruction of the Iraqi regime.

That Saddam's (and his regime's) survival became such a controversy in the aftermath of the war is understandable, yet may be explained best in light of some insights on war strategy and termination offered by Fred Charles Ikle, in Every War Must End. Ikle notes the peacetime tendency of nations to "...manage to live with unresolved conflicts and even tolerate the risk that some of those conflicts might lead to war." But once war is declared, tolerance "vanishes", and "governments usually make more stringent demands of a settlement for ending a war than they imposed upon the relationship...during the prewar period."³⁵ As hostilities continue, and passions rise, the demands increase: "In part, governments tend to lose sight of the ending of wars and the nation's interests that lie beyond it, precisely because fighting a war is an effort of such vast magnitude."³⁶ In effect, the villainy with which Saddam Hussein was depicted, the domestic support for the President, and the relative ease with which Iraqi forces were vanquished in the KTO fueled the passions of those who demanded that the Coalition drive "on to Baghdad".

In view of U.S. interests in the region and concern for long-term stability - the specific policy objective cited by Record to argue that the U.S. had not gone far enough to ensure "security and stability of the Persian Gulf" - this writer would argue that President Bush demonstrated considerable self-control and admirable statesmanship by accepting termination of the war short of Saddam's downfall, however desirable that may have seemed at the time. Stability in the troubled Middle East is a relative term, and the impact on the Coalition of driving further into Iraq after its forces' expulsion from Kuwait (or even the total destruction of the Republican Guard, a major source of the regime's power and control) was unpredictable at best, and likely to be disastrous to a unified front. Jeffrey Record's assertion (cited earlier) that security and stability of the Gulf demanded

a "permanent elimination of Iraq's ability to threaten its neighbors"³⁷ seems both naive and dangerous. A "permanent elimination" of the military power of any state is probably impossible unless a permanent occupation is maintained, along with permanent economic and political sanctions that, in the shifting alliances of the Middle East, may not be in the best interests of the U.S. or of the Arab members of the Coalition.

It is important to note that the post-war intransigence of the Iraqi regime (as demonstrated in its internal strife putting down rebellion by Shiites in the south and Kurds in the north, and its disregard of UN sanctions agreed to in the ceasefire) may simply be the price to be paid for maintaining the tenuous stability of that turbulent region. For the destruction of Saddam's regime would not likely have produced a benign successor eager to please the West or its neighbors. The bottom line is that U.S. political objectives were appropriate in the Persian Gulf; and they were achieved, although the length of the period during which Iraq poses no external threat will probably be shorter than it would have been had the Republican Guard been further destroyed. That Saddam's regime was not destroyed and that the likelihood of a permanent and universally lauded peace was not attained at war termination are results of the complexity of the region and the issues involved, not a failure to appropriately address them.

V. CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE OPERATIONAL-LEVEL COMMANDER

The Persian Gulf War was unique in many ways - from the near-complete isolation of Iraq in the international arena, to the six-month unmolested deployment and build-up of Coalition forces, to the total air supremacy of the Coalition. Due to its uniqueness, critics of military doctrine are quick to downplay the lessons learned in the Persian Gulf as having no real value in our preparation for the next

conflict. In fact, however, there are a number of lessons to be learned from this war, some of them specifically founded in our realization that the exact scenario will probably never again present itself, thereby presenting the challenge of devising new ways of resolving the problems handled in the Gulf.

The assessment of war termination in the Gulf represents an area of concern that is relatively unexplored and uncharted in military doctrine. Yet it is emerging as an increasingly important element of the study of policy and strategy and their translation into operations. The Gulf War provides a number of considerations for future operational-level commanders (CINCs) and their planners that will impact on war termination in the future. Although certainly not all-inclusive, several of the most important considerations are offered for discussion.

(1) The dramatic increase of modern communications capability drastically shrinks the distance between the operational-level commander and the National Command Authority (NCA), and makes real-time decisionmaking by national leaders possible.

While this enhances both the flow of information and recommendations from the theater to the NCA, as well as the guidance from the NCA back to the CINC, it also increases the tendency for national leaders to make decisions before completely understanding the situation. GEN Schwarzkopf's decision to agree to imposition of a ceasefire, as a result of the call from GEN Powell, demonstrates this tendency. In the midst of battle, the exact status of both enemy and friendly forces was difficult to ascertain; and the fog of war was certainly in evidence. Yet the CINC made the decision to terminate the fighting. It seems clear that the operational commander must ensure that political decisionmakers understand the confusion which exists during battle; that he takes advantage of communications capability to keep the NCA informed; but he must strive to preclude use of that instrument to rush decisions before attaining complete information from subordinate commanders.

(2). Public support for American involvement is a critical foundation for war termination strategy, due to its potential impact on political objectives. As a potential center of gravity at the strategic level, it must be considered and protected not only by the political leadership, but by the CINC as well. First, the CINC does have a role - as the chief military expert in his region - in advising the NCA on the political objectives the nation should pursue in his region. Clearly stated policy objectives that support U.S. interests are critical to popular support. Secondly, the "American way of war" (an aspect of U.S. strategic culture) requires the use of overwhelming force to end a conflict quickly. Although not always possible, this American propensity must be taken into account; the CINC can attempt to avoid piecemeal introduction of U.S. forces or participation in a potentially protracted conflict. At worst, he must understand the need for producing indicators of success, incremental dividends that demonstrate the effectiveness of the campaign plan and help maintain the momentum of popular support.

Third, the CINC must recognize the sensitivity of the American public to casualties. Jeffrey Record insists that this sensitivity is a major lesson of the Gulf War that might be learned by future opponents. He claims that "the desire to minimize both U.S. military and Iraqi civilian casualties was the single most important determinant of the shape and course of DESERT STORM."³⁸

Finally, the CINC must establish a program that incorporates the media into his campaign plan. While operational security (OPSEC) and command and control of media personnel must be ensured, the desire of the public to know what is happening is critical to the maintenance of popular support.

(3) The CINC requires officers assigned to his staff who are educated and trained to function at the higher end of the spectrum of tactics-operations-strategy. Until the rank of Lieutenant Colonel/Commander (O-5), most military officers have functioned almost solely in the tactical environment.

The study of policy and strategy, and the focus on the operational level of warfare are provided primarily in the Armed Forces' Senior Service Colleges, although the Army and Marines do offer a School of Advanced Military Studies to selected graduates of their respective staff colleges. But the understanding of how the nation's political objectives are translated into strategy and the selection of operational-level military objectives (which target enemy COGs) require professional education that transcends the schooling provided to the majority of our officers. Assignment of officers to the staffs of the CINCs must take into account the adequacy of their preparation to serve there.

(4). The CINC requires officers who are experts in his region. Without an understanding of the region's culture(s), values, and institutions, the CINC will find it nearly impossible to accurately assess the enemy, identify his center(s) of gravity, and to organize and employ forces to achieve the nation's political ends.

Furthermore, officer planners must understand the national objectives, culture, and capabilities of potential allies within the theater. War termination in the Persian Gulf was significantly affected by Coalition members' objectives. Additionally, the creation of a coalition, imbued as it normally will be with differing interests, perspectives, and cultures, creates a potential (and likely) center of gravity that the CINC must protect. The education and training of the officers on the CINC's staff is critical to avoidance of embarrassing or damaging situations that might fracture the alliance in coalition warfare.

(5) Good political-military relations are instrumental to the formulation of the plan and conduct of the campaign. Several factors were apparent during Operation DESERT SHIELD/STORM that may not always exist: (1) presidential decisionmaking produced clearly defined national political objectives; (2) the President was determined to avoid micromanagement of the military in the planning and conduct of the campaign; and (3) the interface between political decisionmakers and the CINC

was managed by an officer - the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff - who was well-respected by both military and civilian leaders.

Without the clearly established guidance provided early by the President, the CINC's position would have been extremely difficult. Without clear political aims, military alternatives might have provided force without a purpose. Or, if the CINC had been required to establish military objectives without clearly defined political objectives, he would have been likely to become the apologist for the use of force as well, much as GEN Westmoreland has been the focus of debate on Vietnam for years.

The freedom the CINC was afforded in formulating his campaign plan must in large measure be attributed to the confidence the President placed in the Secretary of Defense and GEN Powell. But the likelihood of greater Presidential involvement in campaign planning in the future is great, particularly due to the already-mentioned communications capability, and to the potential deployment of forces of Presidents who may not demonstrate the trust that President Bush placed in the military leadership.

The CINC's responsibility is clear. Not only must he understand the political objectives and devise - based on his military expertise and understanding of the region - a campaign plan with military objectives that will achieve the political ends; but he must also be willing to voice his concerns when policy objectives are muddled, or when the civilian leadership directs military action that is not consistent with attainment of the political ends. The 1950 Defense Reorganization Act empowered the CINCs, but it also entails the responsibility of the CINC to provide his expertise and experience to enhance decisions and of the NSC. The CINC's acquiescence to guidance from the NSC without discussion or critical assessment would be dangerous and a denial of his responsibilities as a CINC.

U.S. doctrine for war termination requires considerable expansion. Although discussion of war conflict termination in professional journals is on the rise,

doctrine is slow to emerge. The new preliminary draft of Army Field Manual 100-5: Operations offers some discussion of conflict termination, but it is framed at the theoretical level, with little instruction provided in the "how to" mode. War termination is a complex and "fuzzy" concept that requires an in-depth understanding of military capabilities (both ours and the enemy's), as well as a detailed comprehension of the society, culture, and values of the enemy. COL Bruce S.J. Clarke, in the Army War College's Strategic Studies Institute, is doing some seminal work on war/conflict termination now. But the Army and our other services are still a long way from publishing useful doctrine.

VI. Conclusion

An assessment of war termination in the Persian Gulf War indicates that the United States successfully accomplished its stated political objectives as a result of achieving the military objectives of the campaign. While Coalition forces stopped short of utterly destroying the Republican Guard forces in the KTO, the political objective of enhancing stability in the region was accomplished, at least in the short term. Similarly, although destruction of Saddam Hussein's regime might have alleviated the problem of Iraqi intransigence, it would not likely have contributed to long-term stability in the region, and therefore might have been counter-productive to attainment of U.S. political aims.

While many of the circumstances of the Persian Gulf War appear to be unique to that conflict, a number of observations are appropriate that focus on important considerations for the operational-level commander. These considerations include the following: the ever-increasing capability for world-wide communications and its impact on decisionmaking; the criticality of popular domestic support; the crucial necessity for the training and education of military professionals to provide the expertise required on the staffs of the Unified Commands; the increasing requirement for close political-military relations at the highest level; and the distillation and publication of doctrine that will guide military planners in campaign planning toward effective war termination. All of these considerations have the potential to impact significantly on successful war termination across the spectrum of conflict.

ENDNOTES

1. Jeffery Record, Hollow Victory: A Contrary View of the Gulf War (McLean, Virginia: Brassey's, Incorporated, 1993), p. 159.

2. Russel Watson, et al, "Unfinished Business?" Newsweek, 8 April 1991, p.18.

3. Record, p.160.

4. Ibid., p. 156.

5. Carl von Clausewitz, On War (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1976), p. 579.

6. Fred Charles Ikle, Every War Must End (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), p.1.

7. Ibid., p.2.

8. Bruce B.G. Clarke, Conflict Termination: A Rational Model (Carlisle, Pennsylvania: Strategic Studies Institute, 1992), p.14.

9. von Clausewitz, p.92.

10. Record, p.151.

11. Clarke, p.13.

12. U.S. Army, Field Manual 100-5: Operations (Preliminary Draft), (Fort Monroe, Virginia: 1992), p.7-27.

13. Ibid., p.1-6.

14. U.S. Department of Defense, Final Report to Congress: Conduct of the Persian Gulf War (Washington, 1992), p. 19.

15. Ibid., p.21.

16. Ibid., p.319.

17. Ibid., p.72.

18. Ibid., p.74.

19. H. Norman Schwarzkopf, It Doesn't Take a Hero (New York: Bantam Books, 1992), p. 469.

20. Ibid.

21. H. Norman Schwarzkopf, quoted in Harry G. Summers, Jr., On Strategy II: A Critical Analysis of the Gulf War (New York: Dell Publishing, 1992), p.281.

22. Ibid., p.280.

23. Based on information disseminated through the chain of command to the author of this paper at the conclusion of Operation DESERT STORM, March 1991.

24. U.S. Department of Defense, p.72.

25. U.S. News and World Report, Triumph Without Victory: The History of the Persian Gulf War (New York: 1992), p.405.

26. Record, p.156.

27. U.S. Department of Defense, p.140.

28. Schwarzkopf, It Doesn't Take a Hero, pp.469-470.

29. U.S. Department of Defense, p.19.

30. Record, p.156.

31. Ibid.

32. Schwarzkopf, It Doesn't Take a Hero, p.469.

33. George J. Church, "Keeping Hands Off", Time, 8 April 1991, pp.24-25.

34. Ibid., p.24.

35. Ikle, p.9.

36. Ibid., p.2.

37. Record, p.156.

38. Ibid., p.151.

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